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ABSTRACT

This study proposed a curriculum design for special education teacher preparation that sought to develop beliefs and stimulate thinking around a construct of teacher efficacy. Class discussions using six narratives collected from veteran special educators served as a curricular component for a student teacher seminar to talk about teacher efficacy for students with disabilities. A reference group of other professionals, parents, and students framed the narratives around five bottom line teacher efficacy objectives. The narrative activity was presented to 18 student teachers in fall 2000. Seven patterns emerged: the narratives confirmed real classroom experience; aspects of some special educator tasks were crystallized; a community of learners grappled with the narrative dilemmas; certain special educator role dimensions were influenced by age and experiences; philosophies, pronouns, and certain understandings seemed to change; talk about hard efficacy problems led to questioning solutions; and new bottom line objectives of teacher efficacy emerged. The narratives provided an opportunity to present hard-to-capture ideas, supported A. Bandura's 1997 template for the sources of self-efficacy, served as a textbook for and by practitioners, and stimulated teacher efficacy talk. (Contains 61 bibliographic references.) (SM)

Teacher Efficacy Narratives as a Curricular Component for Preservice Teachers

Vinni M. Hall

2001

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Abstract: Veteran Teacher Efficacy Narratives as a Curricular Component for Student Teaching Seminars

Teacher efficacy is a self-construction involving teacher's beliefs and perceptions of 'I can make a difference and I know how'. Class discussions using six narratives collected from veteran special education teachers served as a curricular component for a student teaching seminar to 'talk' about teacher efficacy for students with disabilities. A reference group of other professionals, parents and students framed the narratives around five bottom-line teacher efficacy objectives. The narrative activity was presented to 18 student teachers in Fall, 2000. Seven patterns emerged: (1) the narratives confirmed 'real' classroom experience; (2) aspects of some special educator tasks were crystalized; (3) a 'community of learners' grappled with the narrative dilemmas; (4) certain special educator role dimensions were influenced by age and experiences; (5) philosophies, pronouns and certain understandings seemed to change; (6) talk about 'hard' efficacy problems led to questioning solutions; and (7) new bottom-line objectives of teacher efficacy emerged. The narratives are seen as a valuable method as curricular component because they: (1) provided an opportunity to present hard to 'capture' ideas; (2) supported the Bandura (1997) template for the sources of self-efficacy; (3) served as a 'textbook' for and by practitioners. Finally, the narratives stimulated teacher efficacy 'talk' and possibly the student teachers unpacked some of their beliefs and perceptions about the role of the special educator.

Vinni M. Hall

Teacher Efficacy Narratives as Curricular Component

Objectives/Rationale

This study proposed a curriculum design for special education teacher preparation that sought to develop beliefs and stimulate thinking around a construct of teacher efficacy. Belief systems and teachers' lay theories, etc. are a foundation of teacher practice. They have an influence on their professional role and either explicitly or implicitly guide teacher behaviors. The connection between what a teacher does and what students learn and are able to do emerges as a manifestation of the teachers' belief systems.

Special educators face unique teacher efficacy issues because student performance and success do not necessarily parallel their own experiences as students. Moreover, historical discrimination against students with disabilities, frequent violations of children's special education rights, unresponsive and inflexible bureaucracies, the inability of some families to function as their children's advocate and bleak post-school adjustment outcomes for special education graduates point to the need for the special educator to have strong beliefs that 'I can make difference' and 'I know how to'.

Any teacher preparation program must enable its teacher candidates to be active agents of their practice and not 'received knowers' (Belenkey, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule, 1986). Teachers not only dispense knowledge but they also must construct knowledge. Chin (1997) says:

As I reflect upon the core beliefs that I have about what I stand for as a teacher educator, it becomes clear that I advocate the importance of articulating, critiquing, and

understanding one's beliefs about teaching and learning. Those beliefs serve as the foundation that informs practices as a teacher designs curriculum for students. Finally, the importance of establishing frameworks for understanding so that one can monitor the effectiveness of one's own teaching leads to an iterative process of professional development and improvement of one's teaching (p.129).

Teacher education programs cannot be responsible for the beliefs that teacher candidates bring with them, but there is an expectation programs will bring about change (learning) through reasoning. Special education preservice teachers are not without self-constructions of how to organize, how to decide what is good teaching and who is teachable based on years of experiences as students. However, having a clear notion of 'self' as an efficacious teacher for students with disabilities is unlikely. Teacher efficacy may be vaguely defined for teachers of 'regular' students but such a definition is unlikely for children with academic, behavior or physical differences.

Teaching special education students is a complex task involving the development of strong relationships between teacher and student, making moral judgements about what is appropriate to teach and, not least, how to deal with new specific situations (discipline, parental communication, learning styles). There are few opportunities in teacher preparation programs for teacher candidates to consider how, why, when and what they believe or know about educating students with disabilities.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, from which the construct of self-efficacy is derived, suggests that people will pursue activities and situations in which they feel competent and

avoid situations in which they feel they may not be able to perform successfully. Bandura (1986) makes the distinction between judgement of personal competence to engage in a behavior and “judgements of the likely consequences that behavior will produce” (Bandura, 1986, p.391). The consequences are the outcomes of a performance not the performance itself.

Teachers’ beliefs in their efficacy affect their general orientation toward the educational process as well as their specific instructional activities. Those who have a low sense of instructional efficacy favor a custodial orientation that takes a pessimistic view of students’ motivation, emphasizes control of classroom behavior through strict regulations, and relies on extrinsic inducements and negative sanctions to get students to study (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). Melby (1995) finds that teachers with a low sense of efficacy are mired in classroom problems. They distrust their ability to manage their classrooms; are stressed and angered by students’ improvability; take a custodial view of their job; resort to restrictive and punitive modes of discipline; focus more on the subject matter than on students’ development; and, if they had to do it all over again, would not choose the teaching profession (Bandura, 1997, p.241).

According to Bandura (1986), the sources of self-efficacy are: (1) enactive mastery: a self-judgement that a purposive performance was highly successful; (2) vicarious experiences: a self-judgement that others’ actions (either modeled or compared) are personally possible; (3) verbal persuasion: a self-judgment that words from ‘important’ persons or books can motivate and reinforce the sense of personal success; and (4) physical arousal: a self-judgement of how one feels (one’s gut reaction) that validates the strength of the effective self.

Guskey and Passaro (1994) modified Gibson and Dembo’s (1984) Teacher Efficacy Scale

to create a construct that separates internal (“I can”, “teachers can”) and external (“I can’t”, “teachers can’t”) dimensions of teacher efficacy.

The internal and external distinction identified in this study more accurately represents teachers’ perceptions of the strength of different and independent factors. The internal factor appears to represent perceptions of *personal* influence, power, and impact in teaching and learning situations...The external factor, on the other hand, relates to perceptions of the influence, power and impact of elements that lie *outside the classroom*, hence, may be beyond direct control of individual teachers. (p. 639).

The internal and external dimensions of the teachers’ sense of efficacy are very important for special education teachers thus, teacher decisions while working with students who are eligible for special education services may include dealing with possible contentious complications such as: off-task behavior; time lost between activities; poor self-image because the student may not see himself as ‘normal’ and frequent interventions for behavior problems.

Advocacy seems to be tangential to special education. Advocacy must be a disposition to be responsible and possess an attitude of steadfast watchfulness to ensure the receptivity and responsiveness of the educational system (Herbert & Mould, 1992). The special education teacher must understand that a parent and/or student may need a spokesperson; view teaching as a ‘call’(Hansen, 1995); believe they can make a difference in the life of a student with disabilities and among other ideas; have the skills required to motivate others to advocate for that same student (Stoecklin, 1994). The special educator must serve the child, a task which may or may not be compatible with the school district or local school administration.

Study Design

(1) Using veteran teachers' stories in the preservice experience exploited the notion that preservice teachers have to think about what they think and/or what the narrator may be doing in a particular 'authentic' physical and social context. Narratives from veteran special educators containing decision dilemmas and revolving around a specific efficacy objective attempted to develop and clarify the preservice educators' belief and perception systems toward greater teacher efficacy.

Instead of a definitiveness of answers and fixes, the focus would be on possibilities, methods of reasoning, alternative conjectures, and supporting evidence and arguments. It could legitimate and invest authority in a stance of deliberative uncertainty in and about practice. (Ball and Cohen, 1999, p. 17).

(2) Discussion of the narratives as a group process was designed to prod the preservice teacher deal with others in the community with their attitudes and interests and distribute a kind of collective 'intelligence' to understand their role as a special educator.

The questions examined were:

1. What are the dimensions of efficacy as experienced by special education veteran teachers?
2. Are there any discernable differences between how the preservice teachers conceptualize teacher efficacy before and after reading/discussing selected veteran special education teacher narratives?

Findings

(Question One) Three reference groups were used to read the collected and selected

narratives to articulate and frame the veteran teacher efficacy themes, objectives, strands, themes and bottom-line objectives. The reference groups included: professors of special education at an urban university; administrators of special education from urban school districts; teachers from various school districts; parents with children who are eligible for special education (learning disabilities, autism, mental retardation, and behavior disorders); and students (both high school graduates – one of whom was eligible for services for mental retardation and one of whom was eligible no services). From a group of 31 veteran special educator narratives; six were chosen to present to special education preservice student teachers (See Appendix). Table 1. presents the objectives, strands, themes and bottom-line objectives and narratives created by the reference groups.

Table 1: Bottom-line Objectives Preservice Teachers Need towards Understanding their Role as Special Educators.

Special Education Teacher Efficacy Objective/Strands	Stories that meet the Objectives/Strands	Efficacy Themes	Pedagogical Objectives
Preservice educators need to know that special education students may learn differently than the experiences they had as 'regular' students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *The Way to the Heart is Through the Stomach *Throw Moma From the Train a Kiss *The Bull Who Thought He Was a Swan *A Real Token Economy *Urinal Never Know 	Advocacy; persistence; Student success/failure; compassion and empathy; mismatch between expectation and outcomes	<p>"It's may not be broke but you are expected to fix it."</p> <p>"You win some; you lose some."</p>
Preservice educators need to know that there are paradoxes, dilemmas, tensions, and mismatches when working with students with special needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Graduation Ceremonies * Good Grief * Locked Out of the Cloak Room * The Storm After the Calm * Clear Looking Liquids Can Be Either Water or Alcohol * Autism - A New Anomaly 	Advocacy; persistence	"Play your best hand; it's the only one you're dealt."
Preservice educators need to anticipate some experiences before they run into them; like dealing with emotionally charged situations and working a variety of settings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Roll/Role Reversal Roles * In Your Face Cool * Learning to See in the Dark * You Weep What You Don't Sow * Why Special Education Teachers Slip Through the Cracks 	Structure and relational barriers; savviness/leadership; compassion and empathy	"Be sure to take your umbrella; it might rain."

Special Education Teacher Efficacy Objective/Strands	Stories that meet the Objectives/Strands	Efficacy Themes	Pedagogical Objectives
Preservice educators will deal with more professional colleagues and others as a special educator.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * IEP/MDC Personality Wars * ?Que Pasa? * Can He/She Sit in Your Room? * If You Borrow a Cup of Sugar, at least Return the Cup * Tea for Two * My Principal Doesn't Get It * Alone in a Crown 	Structure and relational barriers; compassion and empathy; teaming, networking	"Not every shoe fits your foot."
Preservice educators need to understand that they filter information through their subjective, idiosyncratic experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Teacher Bites Her Own Dog * Shake, Rattle and Roll * Swallow Your Pride and Push Up Your Sleeve * The Cats Got Your Tongue * Learning Who is Disabled * Teaching and Learning are Reciprocal * A Stranger in Your Own Home * Just Because I Smile at You Doesn't Mean I Like You 	Teacher success/failure; self-efficacy; compassion and empathy	"You can't always look through rose colored glasses."

(Question Two) As an associate professor of special education, I taught 18 students in a student teaching seminar at an urban university. After many discussions with various members of the reference group; I felt that the teacher efficacy talk would have more impact if the preservice special educators were in classrooms in front of students who were receiving special education services. Context, it was thought, would make the narratives connected to 'real-life' situations.

The student teacher members of the seminar met with me once a week for three hours for 14 weeks. Two additional weeks were allocated to the Teacher Certification Department for workshops providing graduation and teacher licencing requirements. Designing lesson plans; planning employment portfolios; reviewing for state teacher certification examinations; and troubleshooting classroom challenges were among the tasks to be completed in this seminar. The state board of education licenses special education teachers to work with students from kindergarten to twelfth grade. Therefore, the student teacher members spent eight weeks in an elementary school and eight weeks in a high school setting. Sites for the student teaching activities were in urban public schools.

18 students agreed to participate in the study. There were 2 males and 16 females, 4 white and 14 black students. Ten were completing their bachelors and eight were completing their master's degrees in special education. The majority of the students knew someone with a disability but only four had any direct responsibility caring for a disabled person. Most students had some experiences in schools as teacher aides/bus attendants and 13 students had at least six months experience in classrooms with mildly disabled students. The students' age ranges are as follows: four students were under the age of 26; five students were between ages 26-35; two students were between the ages of 36-45; five students were between the ages of 46-55 and two

students were over age 55.

The ‘try on’ activity began during the first week of the last eight weeks of the semester when students were at their respective high school sites. The following tables present the time lines, description of activities, prompts that I used to begin or sustain the activity, the matching strand/objective/themes and some ideas or quotes by the preservice teachers that ‘capture’ what I thought were the predominating ideas. The first table 2. is designed to set out what baseline data was collected and general highlights. The second table 3. outlines how the narrative activity were presented with quotes of the ensuing discussion. The final table 4. presents the discussion of the themes in the post interviews framed with the Guskey and Passaro(1994) model of teacher efficacy construct dimensions.

Efficacy construct dimensions

		<i>Internal</i>	<i>External</i>
		<i>(Positive)</i>	<i>(Negative)</i>
Efficacy	PERSONAL	I can	I cannot
	TEACHING	Teachers can	Teachers cannot

Table 2: Week One (Collected Seventh Class Meeting)
Baseline Data Collection Procedure and Patterns Noted

Type of Data Collected	Teacher Prompts	Patterns Noted- Views of Preservice Educators
Philosophies of Education	Prepare a philosophy of education for a prospective employer; it should be no more than one page in length	Only one student included students with disabilities. All students focused on student outcomes. No student spoke of his/her own competencies. Example: "I think it is important for material to be meaningful, that all children can learn, and that learning takes place anywhere at anytime." Teacher is all knowing and all solving.
Journal Entries	Record your daily experiences and feelings as you student teach; what events at the end of the day do you remember	Classroom management was most problematic. 7/18 respondents complained about student behaviors. 6/18 respondents complained about supervising teacher behaviors.
Perception of the Roles of Regular Educators and Special Educators	Please compare and contrast the roles of special educators and regular educators	12/12 respondents agreed that <u>both</u> educators educate students, must be flexible, communicative, knowledgeable, caring, good behavior management skills; must be teacher/leader. 7/12 respondents felt that role of special educator is <u>different</u> than that of a regular educator (adapting curriculum; implementation of a structured atmosphere; documentation of student progress; manipulation of Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals, tend and advocate to individual students).
Initial Teacher Efficacy Discussion	As you listen to each others' experiences with student teaching what do you think about as it pertains to your role or a special educator's role for students with disabilities.	Results of one taped discussion at seventh week (approximately 20 minutes): Special Educators have to juggle more variables; special education may not be as effective because of student behaviors; assist regular educators with learning and behavioral problems; teacher adapts for different learning styles; teacher must be resourceful

Table 3. Veteran Special Educator Narrative Presentations (Weeks 2-7)

N = Number of Participants

Week	N	Story Title and Synopsis	Pedagogical Objective/Strand	Themes	Teacher Prompts	Response Quotes that Represent Prevailing Discussion Trends
1	13	The Way to the Heart A high school teacher of students with learning disabilities understood her own limitations in teaching a variety of subjects and knew she had to team with regular teachers to insure student success.	“It may not be broke but you are expected to fix it.” “You win some; you lose some.” Teacher learning experiences may not be the same as for a student with disabilities.	Advocacy, persistence, student success/failure compassion empathy mismatch	Read passage to yourself and tell me what you think; write your thoughts; let’s talk about this as I tape your comments.	“The teacher should have taken some refresher courses.” “I am experiencing the same thing now; I don’t know anything about teaching geometry.” “I have had to swallow my pride and ask for help.” “I have had to stay up many nights reading in order to prepare for students.” “All teachers feel inadequate at times.”
2	15	IEP/MDC Personality Wars Case manager rejects an eligibility labeling decision at a multi-disciplinary conference of a student despite the ‘imposing’ personality of the psychologist.	“Not every shoe fits your foot.” Special educator deals with more professional colleagues.	Structural and relational barriers; teaming; networking	Read passage to yourself and tell me what you think; write your thoughts; let’s talk about this as I tape your comments.	“She (case manager) was brave for going against the others.” “I agree - I hope I have been given the tools to make a good decision.” “I hope I have enough nerve to do this.” “The case manager became the advocate for her student.”

Table 3. Veteran Special Educator Narrative Presentations (Weeks 2-7) continued

Week	N	Story Title and Synopsis	Pedagogical Objective/Strand	Themes	Teacher Prompts	Response Quotes that Represent Prevailing Discussion Trends
3	15	Graduation Ceremonies Special educator brings legal pressure on the principal of her school to ensure that her students who receive services for deaf disabilities graduate at the same ceremony as their non-disabled peers	"Play your best hand; it's the only one you're dealt." Paradoxes, dilemmas and tensions when working with special students.	Structural and relational barriers; savviness, leadership, compassion and empathy	Read passage to yourself and tell me what you think; write your thoughts; let's talk about this as I tape your comments. What would you have done?	"....teacher is very courageous." "....special educator may be the only person who knows the rights of the kid with special needs." "It's a shame the principal doesn't have the conviction of the job that she holds." "Too bad the teacher did not have the principal's job." "The principal is the leader of the whole school including special education."
4	15	Just Because I Smile at you Doesn't Mean I Like You A teacher who works with a student labeled behavior disordered meets a student who irritates her in every way.	"You can't always look through rose colored glasses." Special educators look at students through their own histories.	Teacher success and failure; self-efficacy; compassion and empathy	I talked about the efficacy strands and asked the students to relate this story to them as I taped their comments.	"Sometimes people have a tendency to dislike a fault that they see in another person, because they recognize that they have the same fault." "Students can push your buttons." "We, as teachers, do have the luxury of being self-centered."

Table 3. Veteran Special Educator Narrative Presentations (Weeks 2-7) continued

Week	N	Story Title and Synopsis	Pedagogical Objective/strand	Themes	Teacher Prompts	Response Quotes that Represent Prevailing Discussion Trends
5	16	You Weep What You Don't Sow - Read the IEP A teacher of deaf students is assaulted by a parent of a student. Teacher did not know parent was mentally ill because she did not read the student's IEP.	"Be sure to take your umbrella; it might rain." Educators need to anticipate some experiences before they run into them.	Structure and relational barriers; savviness, leadership, compassion and empathy	I talked about the efficacy strands and asked the students to relate this story to them as I taped their comments.	"I have to provide a safe place for students and I better know as much as I can about each of my students." "I see now that I must read everything about my students." "Security in the school is a real concern for me; especially where I am teaching now." "Our kids go through so much."
6	14	Autism - A New Anomaly A special educator of non-categorical preservice students with disabilities gets an unexpected reaction from a student.	"It may not be broke but you are expected to fix it." "You win some; you lose some." Teacher learning experiences are not the same as for special student.	Advocacy, persistence, student success/failure compassion empathy mismatch	I talked about the efficacy strands and asked the students to relate this story to them as I taped their comments.	"Always expect the unexpected." "... look on the internet, always be on your toes." "Everyday, I will have an adventure with special needs children." "This the best thing about special education, to me, is not knowing what to expect." "Every kid is different - the disability may not impact on all aspects of a student's learning experience in my class."

Table 4. Post Activity Views (Week 8)

Prompts	Bottom-Line Objectives	<u>Teachers Can</u> <u>I Can</u> (General Phrases from Post Activity Views)	<u>Teachers Can't</u> <u>I Can't</u> (General Phrases from Post Activity Views)
<p>What did you think of the stories? Was this a valuable exercise for you as you think about teaching?</p> <p>This was an exit interview (15 minutes) from the program that was a one on one interview where students turned in final assignments and prepared for graduation.</p>	<p>"It may not be broke but you are expected to fix it."</p> <p>"You win some; you lose some."</p>	<p>"I must be professional."</p> <p>"If you do things consistently - you will come up with results that you did not think you could achieve."</p> <p>"You never know what stimulates a child's learning."</p> <p>"I am encouraged by the stories; they let me know that teachers are human."</p> <p>"We have to challenge our students otherwise we aren't really teaching."</p> <p>"These stories gave me permission to get help to work with my kids."</p> <p>"Our students need us to modify, modify, modify but I know I have to get the job done."</p> <p>"I have read some things in these stories that I would do and some things in these stories that I would not do."</p> <p>"I am going to strive to keep my innovation in teaching."</p>	<p>"You're not going to reach every kid."</p> <p>"Reality must set it; sometimes I will get a student to be productive but sometimes no teacher can perform miracles."</p> <p>"Parents look at us as if we can fix their children. A lot of parents really feel that we can fix their children. But you can't."</p> <p>"These stories were a reality check for me."</p>
<p>"Play your best hand; it's the only one you're dealt."</p>	<p>"If I am going to make a difference in a kid's life; I must be willing to change and change the status quo."</p>	<p>"Ignorance is a big thing; I am not so sure that I will very good at first; there are too many things to keep in mind. Special education is messy in a way."</p>	

Table 4. Post Activity Views (Week 8) continued

Prompts	Bottom-Line Objectives	Teachers Can I Can (General Phrases from Post Activity Views)	Teachers Can't I Can't (General Phrases from Post Activity Views)
	"Be sure to take your umbrella; it might rain."	<p>"These stories have caused me to be more proactive."</p> <p>"Do I know how to reach out and get help from my colleagues? I hope so."</p> <p>"These stories have made me want to see the IEP on every child that I will work with."</p>	<p>"Some of these stories are heartbreaking because I will have to take some B.S., I don't know if I have what it takes to advocate that strongly."</p>
	"Not every shoe fits your foot."	<p>"I have to help my colleagues understand what I am doing."</p> <p>"It's my job to help regular teachers, they only spend about one course in special education."</p> <p>"This was like when AIDS first hit the airwaves, people said ahh! ahh! but the more you learned about it - the more understanding you could be; these stories have set out the what I have to do as I work with my colleagues."</p>	<p>"Our problem in special education is regular education."</p>

Table 4. Post Activity Views (Week 8) continued

Prompts	Bottom-Line Objectives	Teachers Can I Can (General Phrases from Post Activity Views)	Teachers Can't I Can't (General Phrases from Post Activity Views)
	<p>"You can't always look through rose-colored glasses."</p>	<p>"We are going to have to advocate for our kids; I guess you have to fight a fire with fire; I am not going to teach in the basement, bathroom or some corner. These kids will not have any self-esteem. I am not going to have any either."</p> <p>"It takes a lot of strength to be different. I am different as a special educator and my students will feel that way to. I am going to make everyone feel more normal in some kind of way."</p> <p>"I have to believe in what I am doing. I am going say what I have to say. I am going to fight for these kids."</p> <p>"It's all about trial and error."</p> <p>"I think that I will be a pretty good teacher, actually, not because I am vain, but I think a special educator needs to think on his feet and I am willing to learn to be good at what I do. I have common sense. You handle matters with common sense. There are lots of things that I will take with me. I will copy and steal everything."</p>	<p>"These stories scared me. I know that I probably look at the disability before I think of the student - that's not good but I can't help it. I feel so sorry for some of these kids."</p> <p>"The principal doesn't care; nobody really pays attention to what you do."</p>

Emergent Patterns

(1) The narratives seemed to ‘confirm’ true pictures of ‘real’ classroom experiences.

(2) The narrative activity promoted a clearer understanding of the teacher task to the bottom-line objectives. It crystalized an idea (of how some veteran special educators view teacher efficacy) that may have been diffuse. The oldest male student (over 55 years old) said, “Teaching is not just about whether you know the curriculum or the ‘academic stuff’ but that you have to get along with the people and the students your work with; understand and think about what you can and can’t do; understand what you might do and should not do. You gotta ‘do’ something or the student suffers.”

(3) The narratives seemed to build student teacher community. The student teachers took group photos, ate meals together; had a joint graduation party; exchanged lesson plans; collected material for one another; etc. As one student put it, “I learned from everyone here in the class. I realize there is more than one way to tackle a problem”.

The student teachers seemed to develop a ‘trust’ to try out their solutions. One verbal exchange that occurred during the discussion of the narrative about the high school special educator who had to get tutored by a math colleague in order to get her student with learning disabilities to graduate:

Student R said, “I know one thing, that teacher should not be in a high school program if she is that dumb. She should not be teaching those kids if she doesn’t know the subject matter.”

Another Student B said, “What makes you so smart? You were just complaining to me that you don’t remember anything about algebra and yet you have to teach it. Maybe you shouldn’t be student teaching.”

She (Student R) replied, “I did not mean me. If you are a teacher, you are supposed to know the subject matter, that’s what I mean.”

Student C said, “ You can’t know it all and you will forget most. How can you say something like that? If all these teachers knew their subject matter like you say, the kids would be doing much better in school. I know that I may know something but I don’t always know how to present it and I know that I sometimes have trouble presenting information that I know very well. I am learning a lot of time right along with the kids I am teaching. I am a day and a lesson ahead of my students.”

(4) There was an age differential reaction to the narratives in four areas: principal expectation; student expectation, advocacy for students with disabilities against colleagues and the challenge of special education.

A. Principal Expectation: The students who were over 40 years old were strong in their feelings that the principal of a school sets the example for how regular educators respond to special education. They tended to ‘blame’ the principal in class discussions for the general mismatches between regular and special educators in a school.

B. Student Expectation: The younger students (under 34-years-old) seemed to expect more academic achievement. Student L says, “ These kids have to know how to read. They can read if you teach them. That’s all I have to say about that.”

“The stories gave me the ‘stick-to-itness’ - you have to keep trying.”

The majority of the older students seemed to support a more functional curriculum. One student said, “ You have to keep it real for these students. You know you have to modify, modify, modify the curriculum.”

C. Advocacy for Students with Disabilities against Colleagues: The older students seemed more brave and expecting to fight for the rights of their students and give voice no matter how political or tense the situation.

“...special educator may be the only person who knows the rights of kids with special needs.”

The younger students seemed outright scared. One (32 years old) said, “When you are new, you don’t know what you are looking at. I will be cautious until I learn the ropes.”

Another (26 years old) remarked, “I hope I have the nerve to advocate for my students.”

Student L (32 years of age) said, “Ignorance is a big thing; I am not sure that I will be very good at first; there are so many things to keep in mind. Special education is messy in a way.”

D. The Challenge of Special Education: Again, the older student teachers said they loved the challenge of special education. Student T (over 55 years of age) said, “...this is why I am going into special education, I look forward to the difference among the children. When I worked in the private sector, things were so predictable. I know that my kids will not behave predictably. I know it will keep me on my toes.”

(5). There were changes from the baseline data to the post activity views characterized:

A. From no inclusion of students abilities in personal philosophies to inclusion: The initial philosophies left out the idea of working with students with disabilities. As the narrative activity proceeded, it appeared that the student teachers seemed to embrace that they were special educators working with students who offer a ‘real’ challenge. I would suggest that special education became synonymous with “Always expect the unexpected.” It seemed as if the student teachers recognized that students with disabilities know they aren’t considered ‘normal’ and part

of their teacher efficacy role is to find a happy medium between academic possibility and the academic 'impact' of the disability.

B. From the use of the noun 'the teacher' and pronouns 'they', 'she' to more personal 'me', 'we', or 'I' pronouns: The responses to the narratives seemed to become more personal and searching as the narrative activity proceeded. The earlier discussions were about what teachers should be doing or what was expected of 'good' teachers.

C. From 'familiar education' cliches to more personal cliches: As mentioned before, most student teachers initially spoke about 'all children/students can learn.'

In later discussions the students' comments reflected a more sure and passionate position about their role as a special educator.

"I have to believe in what I am doing. I am going to say what I have to say. I am going to fight for these kids."

"We are going to have to advocate for our kids; I guess you have to fight fire with fire. I am not going to teach in a basement, bathroom, or some corner. These kids will have any self-esteem. I am not going to have any either."

(6) Talk about 'hard' efficacy problems led to questioning solution choices. The student teachers clearly understood that each veteran teacher had to deal with a dilemma that affected their effectiveness with working with students with disabilities. Consequently, they, too will have dilemmas which must be solved. Recognition of dilemmas may stimulate reasoned possible resolutions.

"These stories gave me permission to get help to work with my kids."

"I have read some things in these stories that I would do and some things in these stories

that I would not do.”

“These stories are a reality check for me.”

“Some of these stories are heartbreaking because I will have to take some B. S. [bullsh_t], I don’t know if I have what it takes to advocate that strongly.

“If I am going to make a difference in a kid’s life; I must be willing to change and change the status quo.”

(7) There was general agreement with the created bottom-line objectives embedded in the narratives. There seemed to be an emergence of new bottom-lines:

A. Preservice teachers should understand that students with disabilities are not labels but people. The preservice educators reiterated themes that their students are unique individuals and not unique disabilities. They seemed to mistrust the labels attached to students.

B. Preservice teachers should understand that they are part of a community of learners. Most students spoke of getting help and championed collective conversations around school problems. These students seemed to include the whole community and its resources when it came to meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

“These stories have given me an opportunity to really listen to others. I felt that this has been an experience to listen to others. I had a chance to really think about things. I will know when to pull it (group of trusted colleagues and anyone who will help me solve a problem) out when I need to.”

Implications

There is the value of using this narrative method as a curricular component to discuss teacher efficacy. The narratives provided an opportunity to present a hard to ‘capture’ idea -

namely teacher efficacy. They provided a springboard stimulating a collective discussion of how 'real' people solved 'real' problems during the student teaching period. The group activity supported the 'Bandura' template for the sources of self-efficacy: enactive mastery (preservice educators were actually in classrooms doing student teaching); verbal persuasion (preservice educators were reading about 'effective' teachers' struggles using the narratives as they struggled); and vicarious experiences (preservice educators were sharing their responses to the narratives and each others' experiences by which to gage their own behaviors and thoughts).

The narratives were packaged with no clear cut solutions which may have led the participants toward working together as 'community of learners'. Students may have been more free to 'create' and 'reason' when there was no specific right or wrong response to the problems presented in the narratives or required by the professor. The narratives served as a textbook by professionals and selected by professionals and the audiences they serve. Veteran teachers told their stories. Reference groups comprised of teachers, professors, parents, administrators and students selected the stories.

Teacher efficacy themes for the audience of student teachers contextualized the teaching task for them as they work with students with disabilities. The narratives seemed to 'capture' teacher efficacy for students with disabilities as evidenced by student teacher response patterns. The students are at least 'pregnant' with the 'high student and self expectation' - will they deliver? The narratives seemed to stimulate the student teachers to unpack some of their beliefs and perceptions about the role of the special educator.

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APPENDIX

I have been teaching over 30 years. I taught students in special education and I feel that I have been fairly successful. I have had some experiences that taught me what being a good teacher is, however, those lessons ain't necessarily fun. I had a 12-year-old young man with a bilateral hearing loss; a fairly good lip reader; and a student who preferred the girls rather than playing the macho male karate kick games frequently observed on the playground. His grandmother or mother never appeared at report card pick up days or at any annual review parent conferences. So when I met his diminutive mother; I was pleased to make contact with a parent. I noticed that Albert seemed anxious. His mother made frequent visits on Wednesday afternoons. She asked about his class work. I generally met with her in the hall for about five minutes. Albert was participating in animal therapy program on Wednesdays that had begun three weeks after mom's regular brief meetings.

When mom visited on the first Wednesday that Albert was participating in the animal therapy program, she became alarmed and accused me of doing untoward sexual things with her son. I sent her to the principal and invited her to call the police if she needed to. She grabbed my clothing and started shrieking at me. I fended off her blows and then she fled. I was so shook up. I later read the Multi Disciplinary Conference Report and learned that mom was not to see her son except under supervision of a social worker. Mom had dressed this child as a girl for the first two years of his life and burned his face with cigarettes.

After the incident, I learned from the principal that she had the mom arrested for trespassing on two occasions and that she had been keeping an extensive file of letters that mom had sent the school registering her concerns about the school personal doing untoward sexual things to her son. I then learned that mom was living at state mental institution and got passes on Wednesdays. Believe you me, handling the aftermath of this was not easy. I really did not know how to think about this. Why didn't the principal communicate with me? Should I be more thorough in my investigation of students' backgrounds? Postscript: this young man is currently enrolled at University of Illinois as a junior.

Teacher Failure

Mismatch between Expectation and Outcome

Relational Barrier

YOU WEEP WHAT YOU DON'T SOW - READ THE IEP

Vinni - Communication Disorders

Ray School

Veteran Teacher - 32 years

My first class of eighth-grade graduates. I was so proud. I had been working in this school for approximately four years with about ten deaf boys. Their sign language skills were good and we managed quite well with some oral sentences so they could be understood by the hearing world. I took them to the previous year's graduation ceremony and told them they would be wearing their robes and getting their diplomas from the principal and assistant principal. However, when graduation practice sessions begun; the regular education teachers indicated that we would have a separate graduation ceremony. They told me that special education students do not participate in the same graduation ceremonies as the regular kids. I told them that was against the law. I talked to the principal, Mr. Lasley. He upheld the regular education teachers' insistence on separate graduation ceremonies. I asked for a meeting with the teachers involved and the principal about the matter. Everyone listened patiently but their minds were made up. Was it fair to exclude the young persons in my class because they were deaf? How was I enable my colleagues to see the value of including these youngsters? What was the school 'political' fall out going to be for my insistence that my youngsters be included? How would the kids, themselves, feel? Was I the only one making a point? I called the Office for Civil Rights; they sent a lawyer to talk with the principal. Ultimately, my kids marched with everyone else during a 'unified' graduation ceremony. My kids and their parents were beaming. Even after the summer hiatus, I had hell to pay. But I am rich so I could pay anyway. My colleagues and the principal gave the cold shoulder for quite a time.

Compassion and Empathy

Advocacy

Structural or Relational Barrier

Persistence

GRADUATION CEREMONIES

Miriam - Deaf

Prescott School

Veteran - 28 years

Here I am in a great [i.e., good reputation] high school setting with boys who come to me for support at various periods in the day because they are eligible for learning disabilities special education services. I joined Langston High School in a January so I met everyone mid year. All of these guys were failing in at least one or more core subjects. Unfortunately, I had come from an elementary setting where I had worked with students with learning disabilities in a self-contained classroom for approximately 19 years. What was I going to do working with subjects like algebra, English Composition, General Science, Spanish and preparing these guys for state exams? I hadn't seen an algebra book in years and I did not remember much about General Science, English Composition or Spanish. Christ Almighty, I felt like a fish out of water.

I went to the principal, who provided me with textbooks for each of the core subject areas but even with doing lots of homework before I met the boys each day, I felt ineffective. Those boys were still failing and getting harder to control.

I make some great pastry; so I made some almond coffee cake and invited the algebra teacher of one of my senior boys in for coffee and coffee cake. We started talking and I asked him how my guy was doing. He said the young man had failed every test and was not expected to pass or graduate. I hated to admit my ignorance in algebra but I needed his help to get this student to make it. So, believe it or not I got tutored in algebra so I could help this student. The student eventually passed with a 'D'. It was his real passing grade and maybe mine, too.

Teacher Failure/Teacher Success

Collaboration

Persistence

Leadership

Savviness

THE WAY TO THE HEART IS THROUGH THE STOMACH

Pat - Learning Disabilities

Mather High School

Veteran Teacher - 28 years

When did I first fall in love with my best friend, Pat? Both of us had been a Higgins Elementary working with non-categorical children aged three to five years for over 10 years. When the babies are young, you really can't tell the possibilities of their learning styles or language capabilities. I had older babies who could function fairly well with independent activities and Pat had the more severe ones who seemed more retarded. In the early days, we were able to get lots of 'stuff' for our rooms. I had a plastic kitchen with plastic food in the major food groups. My babies had low language skills per se and I had to change diapers on three of them. My aide and I were working on toilet training and rudimentary language skills and doing quite well thank you very much. My room, my babies, my aid, my 'stuff' - a very happy camper, was I. My principal, whom I liked, indicated to us that a new housing project had been recently built and we were going to be adding over 130 new students to our almost at-capacity building and that I would be teaming with Pat next year in the same room.

Pat's kids were more noisy and needy than mine. How the hell was I going to get anything done with my kids with more noise, more demands on the little bathroom in her room. Then, my principal who I used to like, says that we will be losing our teacher aides part of the day because they will have to help with lunchroom duties and playground supervision. I got my brother and husband to move my stuff on one side of the room two days before school opened. I had accumulated so much kid-friendly junk that we almost did not have room for the kids. Pat moved her stuff in. I don't think either one of us spoke to each other for the first three days. I thought I might have to quit teaching. What would she think of me and my teaching style? I felt violated. I really did not know her. Then Pat said we better talk, "So after school tomorrow, you and I are going out for a beer and talk this out". Ever since then, has it been 15 years?, we have teamed and I'd say most of our babies are adjusting to school and we have been able to send many into a regular class environment, even if for only forty minutes without us. It's like being married; we are a good team.

Mismatch between Expectancy and Outcome

Savviness

Collegial Teaming

Compassion and Empathy

TEA FOR TWO

Linda - Early Childhood; Special Education

Ryder School

Veteran Teacher - 31 years

Jessica, what a little bitch. She brought out the worst in me. I just did not like this 14 year old girl. I couldn't put my finger on it. I didn't want to call on her. I was happy when she was absent. She seemed so mean. I would talk to the class and she always had a comment. I remember teaching about the atmosphere and weather and she mumbles that my hair looks like Ms. Hurricane and Ms. Tornado must be my hairstylists. The class erupted with laughter. I kept everyone in for lunch and recess that day. What is wrong with me? This is a little kid; how could she get the best of me? I had been teaching for 20 years. I have never had such a visceral reaction to a student like I had to this one. Although this was a class for students with behavioral disabilities and I have been called every name in the book; I was 'teflon', but not with this 'thing'. I had a super bright guy, who was a little withdrawn but a smart young man; Jessica would pick a fight with this young man, every recess. I got tired of talking to her about her behavior. Her clothes were suggestive and she teased the boys with sexual innuendos like: "You too small for me to date; I like a man who is 19 years old." I would ask her if her mother knows that she is seeing an older man, then she'd roll her eyes at me and would not respond. The prospect of having this same girl in my class for the next year made me queasy.

We were preparing for our end of year school-wide festival fund raiser. Our class was painting the background for the ring toss. I hear her telling the class how much she hates a certain person in our class so much that she could vomit every time she sees them and looks at me and gags. I almost smacked her. I walked away and I went into the teachers' lounge and cried.

The janitor asked me what was wrong. I told her. She said to me why don't you talk with this girl by herself. I did. Jessica told me that I don't like her and she don't like me. I realized that you get what you give. I made a conscious effort not to be so negative. I am actually in contact with her today; she sends me cards and calls occasionally.

Teacher Failure/Success

Student Failure/Success

Mismatch between Expectancy and Outcome

Compassion and Empathy

JUST BECAUSE I SMILE AT YOU DOESN'T MEAN I LIKE YOU

Laura - Behavior Disorders

Burke School

Veteran Teacher - 21 years.

I had attended approximately 300 Multi Disciplinary Conferences (MDC) over the last 10 years with the same familiar group of psychologists, nurses, social workers and various teacher configurations. The teachers were special educators and/or regular educators. I am the case manager for my school and I get the team together to make special education decisions. Most of the parents attend the initial placement meetings but rarely come out for the three-year re-evaluation MDCs. Obviously, the purpose of the MDC's is to make students eligible, sustain, change, or terminate their special education services.

I run into Queen of all the Psychologists on occasion. She knows more than Freud, Piaget, and Weschler. When she was on an MDC team; I dreaded it. She seem to intimidate everyone. It wasn't soup until she said so.

We met with parents of a new transfer student. This 11 year old young man came to us with an assessment profile that included a significant discrepancy between his performance and verbal skills on the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children. A 15 point discrepancy on this test usually indicates that a student is learning disabled and not retarded. Queen Psychologist said that he was retarded and eligible for special education services. His reading and math scores on the norm-referenced tests were low. His regular classroom teacher reported that he had excellent verbal skills and seemed to understand everything that was going on in class but simply failed all paper and pencil exams and hated reading.

Something did not make sense to me. Should I speak up? Who is going to offer opposition to such an imposing figure as Queen Psychologist? I felt funny but I knew what I must do. The team agreed with the Queen but I did not. They all pointed to low test scores. The parents were vehement that their child was not retarded. I agreed and I refused to sign off on the report. I had to write a special addendum to the report in the midst of some glares from the other team members. The parents sued the school district and about three months later; I get called into the principal's office because I will be deposed by the parents' lawyers.

Advocacy

Leadership

Compassion and Empathy

Structural and Relational Barriers

IEP/MDC PERSONALITY WARS

Tamlyn - case manager

DuSable High School

Veteran Teacher - 34 years.

Years ago, I remember a young man in my class who was beautiful to look at. He had lovely features and his foster parents dressed him with the latest and best 'Sears' that money could buy for eight year-olds. I had been in special education for about five years and thinking I had seen a variety of students with disabilities because I had been working in the school district's south side clinic school where profound and severe student were observed, evaluated and made eligible for special education.

They closed those clinic schools and I was assigned a classroom. Anton joined our class in October. I thought we had plenty of activities to interest any student. Anton rocked back and forth in front of the mirror in our room for about two months. We patiently worked with him to begin to play with other things in the room: toy fish, sand, sandpaper letters. We would take his hand and put the item in his hand and verbally compliment him when he took the items without prompts or cues. We began readiness activities around mid February. There were six students in our class, including Anton. The self-contained class was for students who were eligible for severe to profound mental retardation.

I talk all the time. It is my habit to talk to the kids constantly because you never know. Anyway, I was holding up the Dr. Seuss' "Cat in the Hat". Anton grabbed the book and started reading it aloud. The aide and I were flabbergasted. I grabbed him and kissed him. He shrank from my touch and started screaming his lungs out. Scared the living stuff out of me. What did I do to this kid? Did I hurt him? Did I scare him? Would people think I was guilty of child abuse? We now know that he has autism but no one could tell us what to expect or what to imagine with our kids.

Self-Efficacy

Teacher Success/Failure

Student Success/Failure

AUTISM - A NEW ANOMALY

Diane - Autism

Englewood High School

Veteran Teacher - 27 years



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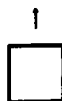
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